

My name is Joan Gurski and I live in West Hartford. I am writing to enthusiastically support H.B. 5174 – An Act establishing a Children's State Flower proposed by Rep. Adinolfi to make Michaela Petit's Four O'Clocks the official Children's State Flower of Connecticut.

As an employee of Channel 3 Kids Camp in Andover & Coventry, a grantee of the Petit Family Foundation, I have seen firsthand how the Petit family and so many dedicated volunteers have turned tragedy into good, and into hope. It's about far more than memorializing innocent lives taken in an act of unspeakable violence; it's about resilience, a positive message for all in Connecticut. It's message to children and adults alike that they can do good in the world with a small act of kindness and nurturing.

It's also more than just a flower—the Michaela's Garden project is designed to encourage area families and youth to become involved in community service. I have attended several events where people have purchased seeds and plants from Michaela's Garden. At the end of the growing season, many people harvest dozens of seeds from the plants and return them to begin new generations of these beautiful, hardy New England flowers that go back to their origination from the few nearly destroyed plants left after the terrible tragedy that none in Connecticut will ever forget. Volunteers prepare seed packets and seedlings—it's a wonderful activity to teach children community involvement. Proceeds from the sales of seeds and plants help to fund the work of the Petit Family Foundation, which focuses on fostering the education of young people, especially women in the sciences; improving the lives of those affected by chronic illnesses; and supporting efforts to protect and help those affected by violence.

By designating Michaela's Four O'Clocks as the Children's State Flower of our state, Connecticut children for generations to come will learn about it in school, as they do about our State Flower, the Mountain Laurel. But they will learn so much more, about what the flower stands for and about how they can make a difference with a simple act of kindness.

Thousands of plants filled with these beautiful flowers now flourish across Connecticut each summer. Watching them blossom each afternoon in my back yard reminds me of a child who I never met but who made such a difference in her too short life— at a young age Michaela Petit took to heart the words of Mohandas Ghandi—"you must be the change you wish to see in the world." She continues even after her death to be the change and make a difference to so many in Connecticut through these flowers—she continues to give hope. Michaela and her family were all dedicated to making the world around them a better place through their volunteerism and community service. I can think of no better way to honor Michaela's memory while continuing to help make a difference to those who benefit from the good works of the Petit Family Foundation than to officially name Michaela's Four-O'Clocks as the Children's State Flower of Connecticut. This designation will help to further spread the good works the Michaela's Garden project has made possible and the inspiration that Michaela's life, along with those of her mother, Jennifer and her sister, Haley, has been to so many of us. Thank you for your time in reading my support for this worthwhile designation.